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"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

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For the Christian Messenger.

"An old Disciple."

Acts xxi. 16.

NOTES OF A SERMON PREACHED IN THE BAPTIST MEETING HOUSE, WOLFVILLE, ON THE MORNING OF LORD'S DAY, MARCH 31, 1867, ON OCCASION OF THE DEATH OF SIMON FITCH, ESQ.

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That is all we know of him. Whether he was converted by our Lord himself, during his earthly sojourn, or whether he was one of those who joined the church at or soon after the day of Pentecost, is not known. It is somewhat singular that no mention is made of him in the legends that became current among the early Christians. The language of the text implies that he was one of the first members of the Christian community. Let us endeavour to ascertain its meaning.

I. He was a disciple.

The meaning is, that he received the Lord's teachings, whether communicated personally or through the medium of his apostles. They comprised many new and strange truths, different from or even contrary to all that he had been taught before. But the teaching was divine. That being admitted, reception was the only duty. It was not for the disciple to cavil, or contradict, or say, "How can these things be?" He went to the Master to learn not to dispute. Discipleship imported teachableness and humility, the spirit of a little child. There was no assumption of right to question, or add, or alter, for truth had been taught by the lips of Truth itself.

All truth was not at first clearly unfolded. The salvation was revealed gradually. The system required time for complete manipulation. As it was more fully unveiled, and new discoveries were made of the character and designs of God; and the spiritual meaning of facts in the Lord's history, religious prejudices were sometimes shocked, and now and then there was a temptation to exclaim, "This is a hard saying!" Still, the only inquiry a genuine disciple would raise was, "Is it the word of the Lord?" He did not set himself up as a judge. It had been promised that the Holy Spirit would "guide into all truth," and he was willing to be guided.

Nor must it be overlooked that the primitive disciple was more than a mere learner of opinions. He received the word "not as the word of men, but as it was in truth, the word of God," and he received it for himself. He not only held sound views on man's ruined state—the way of redemption—the obligation to holiness—the bliss of heaven;—he saw himself to be the ruined man, self-ruined—he rejoiced that he was redeemed "by the precious blood of Christ"—he was conscious of sanctifying power—he "rejoiced in hope."

The meaning was, further, that he practised the Lord's precepts. The religion of the disciple includes more than an intellectual agreement with the divine writers. It is submission to the Master. "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" The commission ran thus—"Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." The disciple imitates Him who has "left us an example that we should follow his steps." His temper and habits of life are conformed to the Lord's will. "Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus."

II. He continued a disciple.

Some fell from the truth. They thought themselves wiser than the Great Teacher.—Some fell from holiness, going back to the world, or "turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness." Some fell into slumber, and slept or dreamed away the life which ought to have been a perpetual act of consecration.—But this good man "kept the even tenor of his way." How was it that he was so distinguished from others?

One reason was—he was a continual student of God's word. Human vagaries creep in, mystifying or perverting the truth. His question was, "What is the word of the Lord?" Humble, diligent study confirmed faith. He experienced the fulfilment of the ancient promise—"The meek will he guide in judgment." Thus, daily "coming" to the Lord,

"as unto a lively stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious," he manifestly appeared as one of the "lively stones," which are "built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

Another reason—he "prayed without ceasing"—well knowing that neither inquiry nor diligence can succeed without prayer. Every true disciple honours the dispensation of the Spirit, and devoutly recognises the order of divine bestowments. "Ask, and ye shall receive."

Further—he maintained christian fellowship, both among the brethren, individually, and in the church. He believed in religious reciprocity, feeling assured that both receivers and givers are benefited by God's arrangements. He desired to see in the church a living commentary on Ephes. iv. 16—"Christ—from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." He held views similar to those which were embodied in Cowper's well-known lines:—

"But souls, that carry on a blest exchange
Of joys they meet with in their heavenly range,
And with a fearless confidence make known
The sorrows sympathy esteems its own,
Daily derive increasing light and force
From such communion in their pleasant course,
Feel less the journey's roughness and its length,
Meet their opposers with united strength,
And, one in heart, in interest, and design,
Gird up each other to the race divine."

III. He was well known to be a disciple.

It had been declared at his baptism, when he publicly announced his determination to live for God, "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." He lived in the days of which it had been prophesied—"one shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand to the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel."

He never blinked it. He was not a border christian, but kept within the king's territory. Worldly men understood him. Though they "thought it strange that he would not run with them to the same excess of riot," they did not venture to ask him to join them, not caring to incur the mortification of a refusal.

He carried his principles into all his engagements. He was a disciple everywhere—in the family, in society, as well as in the church. When doubtful or difficult questions presented themselves, his inquiry was, "What is the will of the Lord?" Hence men knew where to find him, and would anticipate, with general correctness, his line of conduct on any emergency that might arise.

IV. He was kept as a disciple.

There were many inducements to a backward course. Wealth and worldly influence might have been obtained if he had apostatised. But he stood fast. How? Was it force of character, manliness, bold determination to remain faithful to the cause he had espoused? It was all this—but it was something more. It was the grace of God. "By the grace of God I am what I am." "Kept by the power of God."

Manifold afflictions, ordinary and extraordinary, were endured. They did not shake his steadfastness. In the midst of all he could sing, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress?" He firmly believed that as trials did not show that Jesus loved him less, so he would not be moved by them to love the Saviour less than before, but would rather find that they furnished opportunities for richer displays of grace. "For this cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."

Thus he "held on his way" and became "stronger and stronger." Then the infirmities of age came on, with all its disabling tendencies and effects. Other desires failed. Yet he could still say, "one thing I do; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark." It was the ripening of grace, the "full corn in the ear." The saying of the Psalmist was verified—"They shall still bring forth fruit in old age."

At length he died. Where, when, how,

we know not. But are we not entitled to believe that in the last moments of such a one the feelings of good old Simeon were experienced—"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation?" Amid the breaking-up of nature there was peace within, the peace of faith in the finished work, the gracious promises, the all-comprehensive covenant. Humility contemplated the past with self-reproach and sorrow, exclaiming, "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" But Calvary rose up to view, and the "old disciple" died as he had lived, "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Then he went to the Master, joined "the goodly fellowship of the apostles," and entered on a new course of instruction and enjoyment, unmingled with the difficulties, the darkness, and the hindrances of this earthly state.

Our friend and brother whose death has occasioned these remarks was also "an old disciple." He had been nearly fifty years a member of this church, and he was fourscore and three years old when he died.

Simon Fitch was the son of pious parents. His father joined this church in the year 1780, acted as its Clerk for several years, and was chosen, with two others, to the office of ruling elder, which was probably, in a Baptist society, pretty much the same as that of deacon. All his children also became members of the church. He sent his son to Windsor College, where he remained a year or two, and might have completed the usual term of instruction if the arrangements of the Institution had been more favourable to students who were not members of the Church of England. The liberal principles which now distinguish Nova Scotia Colleges were unknown in this province at that time.

The exact period of Simon Fitch's conversion is not known. He became a christian in early life, but did not make a public profession till about forty-seven years ago, when he entered into the fellowship of the church, of which he was an honourable and useful member till his death. At that time the church was in a low state, not numbering more than sixty members. He lived to witness a gratifying change, enjoying and taking part in numerous revivals, in which christians were blessed and sinners brought to God. When he died, the church was more than four times as large as when he joined it, having also dismissed many of its members to form the churches at Gaspereaux and New Minas.

The elements of discipleship were conspicuous in the christian character of our brother. His views of truth were clear, and his attachment to the doctrines of the gospel was strong. Though not so warmly emotional as some, it was sufficiently evident that the truth "came to him not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." His utterances at the conference meetings were at once plain, pithy, and fervent, showing real engagedness of heart.

He loved the word of God and prayer. His piety was fed and nurtured by heavenly truth, the knowledge of which he acquired by diligent study of Scripture. Few are so extensively acquainted with the contents of the Bible as he was. And he lived near to God. Prayer was his joy, his relief, and his solace. His family were steadily assembled for the morning and evening sacrifice, and care was always taken that the servants in the house and farm should enjoy the privilege.

Our friend manifested devout regard to the institutions of Christ. His place in the "assembly of the saints" was regularly filled. During a large portion of his life his residence was upwards of three miles from the central place of worship, but his brethren well knew that his absence on any occasion was only to be ascribed to some providential hindrance. Often, after he was eighty years old, he worshipped here in the morning, at Lower Horton three miles distant in the afternoon, and here again in the evening. Arrangements were also made that his servants as well as his children should have the opportunity of attending public worship.

The Lord blessed him in his family. All his children with the exception of two, who died in infancy, followed him into the church. And the church showed a due appreciation of our brother's varied excellencies by raising

him, a number of years ago, to the deaconship. He discharged the duties of the office with zeal and propriety.

His generosity was exemplary. Successful industry had furnished the means of doing good, and the will was not wanting. To the poor of the neighborhood, as numbers can testify, he was kindhearted and liberal. He did not merely say, "Be ye warmed and filled," but he "gave them those things which are needful to the body." Hospitality was constantly exercised in his house;—though he could not be privileged, like Mnason, to receive an apostle, many of the successors of the apostles found a cheerful welcome under his roof. The claims of the church were conscientiously and kindly regarded. To applications made for the support of the numerous societies, the establishment of which has distinguished the history of this age, he promptly and liberally responded. He was active in promoting the objects of the Bible Society. He was one of the principal supporters of the Temperance Society formed in this place in the year 1829, and which numbered, in successive years, nearly a thousand members; and it is observable that in the original list of members a mark is affixed to his name, indicating that he pledged himself to abstain from wine as well as from ardent spirits, the general pledge being limited to the latter. The Temperance cause engaged his earnest advocacy. In his magisterial capacity he rendered efficient service to it, being firmly persuaded that drunkenness is one of the most degrading and injurious habits, and that the rumshop is a nuisance which ought to be thoroughly abated.

Mr. Fitch's attachment to education was shown in various ways. He took deep interest in Sunday Schools. Several were established by him in the vicinity of his residence, and he filled the office of Teacher and Superintendent till he was upwards of seventy years old. When our Education Society was formed in 1828, he entered into the project with great ardour. It was mainly by his efforts that the fund was raised for the purchase of the property on which the buildings were erected. He was the first Treasurer of the Society, and an active member of the Executive Committee. The same zeal and earnestness were carried into our College affairs. When it was determined, in 1852, to attempt to raise an Endowment Fund, his name was the first among the scholarship-holders, who responded to the appeal made by the original projectors of the movement. In the course of his life the sum of £1700 was contributed to our Educational Institutions by himself and the immediate members of his family. The depth of his feeling on this subject may be judged of by the following entry in his Journal:—"Nov. 5, 1865. Eighty-two years old to-day. More cause for gratitude to my Heavenly Father. Thanks to his holy name for his continued mercies. Oh for a new consecration of myself to him, and an increasing ripeness for glory! May I live to see in the coming year his cause prosper and his kingdom extend on earth! May our Institutions of learning become more firmly established, and spiritual as well as secular knowledge increase and abound in their midst! May the President and Professors of the College be greatly blessed and rewarded by the grace of the Holy Spirit! The Academy also, with its Teachers, now present, and in the future, may they be abundantly blessed! The prosperity of these Institutions has always lain near my heart, and I humbly hope and pray that many youths will go forth from them, who will prove a blessing wherever their lot may be cast."

While our brother could heartily adopt the words of Paul, as expressive of his own feelings—"Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity"—he was naturally and strongly attached to the denomination to which he belonged. It was not bigotry, but conviction, founded, as he believed, and as we all believe on Scripture evidence, that the Baptist denomination is the best representative of the original christian, catholic church of the first century.

As a member of society, and as a magistrate, Mr. Fitch was universally esteemed and respected. His integrity was above suspicion. His conscientiousness was patent to all. He ever sought to do what was right and kind, and to promote the well-being of